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ABSTRACT

Kenneth Burke's concepts of rhetoric, dramatism, terministic screens (perceptual filters), and identification are used in this paper to justify and direct intercultural communication research. Three intercultural methodologies--cultural variable analysis, componential analysis, and ethnomethodology--are examined in the paper using these concepts. The paper suggests that Burke's dramatistic perspective relegates cultural variable analysis and componential analysis to the status of inferior research methodologies when compared with ethnomethodology. The paper concludes that intercultural communication researchers using sociological methods may improve the validity of their interpretations by recognizing the effects of their terministic screens and may use the recognition of differences to construct bonds that identify commonalities and eliminate differences. (FL)

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Intercultural Communication Research:

A Burke's Eye View

Tricia S. Jones

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This article utilizes Burke's concepts of rhetoric, dramatism, terministic screens, and identification to justify and direct intercultural communication research. Three prominent intercultural methodologies - cultural variable analysis, componential analysis, and ethnomethodology - are examined using Burke's theories of rhetoric. Based on this analysis, ethnomethodology appears to be the most valid and heuristic intercultural communication research methodology.

The past two decades have witnessed the addition of a new member to the family of communication study. Although it remains quintessentially adolescent, intercultural communication has evolved from an adopted offspring obtained from sociology and anthropology, to a legitimate fixture in the field of communication.[1] However, communication scholars have yet to imprint this new member with the traditions of their 2,000 year old patriarch, rhetoric.

Some attempts to intertwine the field of rhetoric and its new consort have been made. Cecil Blake succinctly summarized the current state of affairs when he reported that no significant body of knowledge exists which treats the subjects of rhetoric and intercultural communication.[2]

In an effort to rectify this apparent oversight, this article employs Burke's key constructs of rhetorical theory to justify and direct intercultural communication research. The application of Burke's concepts is preceded by a brief explication of the purposes of intercultural research and the prominent methodologies used in this area.

Intercultural Research Methodologies:

Intercultural research serves three general purposes. 1) It describes the nature of communication in specific cultures, highlighting the differences and similarities between cultures. This knowledge enables researchers to develop means of erasing communication differences which act as barriers between members of different cultures. Researchers concerned primarily with the study of differences belong to the cultural criticism school of research.[3] 2) Conversely, researchers may emphasize the similarities of cultures in order to generate a more wholistic conception of human communication. Such researchers and theorists are considered cultural dialoguists.[4] 3) Finally, the culmination of this research serves as the foundation for obtaining a better understanding of our own culture, and the creation and ramifications of culture in general.

The roots of intercultural communication research are buried deep within the disciplines of sociology and anthropology, and to a lesser extent, psychology. Not surprisingly, the major branches of intercultural communication research are typified by the use of three methodologies more commonly found in the scholarly works of these fields rather than in communication. These methodologies - - cultural variable analysis, componential analysis, and ethnomethodology - - have contributed the majority of information in this area.[5]

Cultural variable analysis is the empirical examination of single or multiple variables of cultural behavior. Although the field of communication is no stranger to empiricism, it was not its creator or validator. Communication scholars borrowed the empirical hammer from

psychology. Communication researchers have pounded at intercultural variables with bicep-building determination.[6] Cultural variable analysis focuses on the different value systems underlying cultural activities. Its proponents and practitioners are usually cultural critics seeking to illuminate differences between cultures.

The praises of determinsitic research have been sung by many, and its inadequacies pronounced by more than a few. Empricism in this context deserves some specific criticism. Cultural variable analysts often research isolated variables, removing them from the cultural context which gives them meaning.[7] The selection of suitable variables is rarely predicated upon thorough knowledge of the culture, knowledge necessary for the accurate identification of significant variables.[8] All too often this research is ethnocentrically focused on Wesern societies and the reactions of non-Western people to Western culture.

Cognitive anthropology was developed to obtain insight into the cognitive realities of a society's members. Goodenough suggested that cultures are composed of psychological structures which guide behavior.[9] Therefore, cognitive anthropologists believe that these structures can be analyzed by formal methods similar to those used in mathematics and logic.[10]

The primary tool used in this analysis is componential analysis which attempts to establish a relationship between categories of language and objects, concepts, or events. By discovering these relationships, theorists can supposedly construct a formal model of how people use terminology to reflect their social reality. Moreover, once constructed, this model can be applied regardless of the idiosyncracies of the culture being analyzed.

As with cultural variable analysis, componential analysis has its shortcomings. The quasi-laws approach coupled with the stated goal of an acultural formal calculus removes the possibility, indeed the intention, of considering the creation of meaning. Componential analysis is highly restrictive, concerning only verbal language. Interestingly, even with the emphasis on linguistics; most, if not all, cognitive anthropologists are unconcerned with the biases and assumptions that their own language dictates.

Spawned from modern sociology, ethnomethodology studies how people make decisions and create meaning in everyday life.[11] The benefit of ethnomethodology lies in the discovery of social constructions of reality. Drawing upon phenomenological assumptions, ethnomethodologists study the tot ity of behavior, verbal and nonverbal. More importantly, they not only record a behavior , they attempt to understand the meaning that a behavior has for a member of that society.[12] The information gathered by ethnomethodologists is dependent upon social placement and historical meaning due to the reliance of a culture's members on background expectations in interpreting actions.[13]

"Thick description" is the term Clifford Geertz uses to identify the recording of information in an ethnographic study.[14] Quite simply, to describe something thickly necessitates observing a behavior and explicating the meaning of that behavior.[15] Thick description is microscopic and more intuitive than cultural variable analysis or componential analysis. Unfortunately, it is also more difficult to validate. Nonetheless, thick description can be used to construct theories of intercultural communication,

although these theories will be culturally bound and therefore rules rather than laws oriented.[16]

All three methods of intercultural communication research are subject to criticism; yet, all are potentially informative. It is apparent that each method requires the adoption of certain assumptions on the part of the researcher. The contrasting assumptions implicit in these three methods raise questions about acceptable general critieria for intercultural research.

Generally, it is safe to assume that valid and informative intercultural research should meet at least the following three criteria. 1) Researchers should understand the studied culture thoroughly enough to recognize salient variables.[17] 2) Researchers should be aware of the world-view assumptions that they adopt and the effects of these assumptions have on their research.[18] 3) Finally, the ultimate focus of research should be on the accurate portrayal of the meaning and function of a communicative behavior.[19]

At this point it might seem that something is missing. Where is the communication theory underlying intercultural communication research? Breifly, it isn't there. By borrowing methodologies from other disciplines communicationists have borrowed theoretical assumptions as well; or worse, have sidestepped the question of theory altogether.[20]

Therefore, this article proposes and justifies the efficacy of Burke's rhetorical theory as a much needed basis for intercultural communication research. Building upon this base should enable researchers to justify the analysis of specific variables, select appropriate methodologies,

improve their analytical abilities. Removed from the immediate purview of the researcher, Burke's rhetoric provides a conceptualization for aggregating and employing the knowledge gained from intercultural research. A review of Burke's concepts of rhetoric, dramatism, terministic screens, and identification reveals a rhetorical base that may promote efficient and enlightening research.

The Application of Burke's Concepts to Intercultural Communication Research:

Burke's definition of rhetoric guides intercultural communication researchers in the selection of variables and/or objects of study. Broadening the view of rhetoric proposed by the classical rhetoricians, Burke suggests that persuasion is synonymous with rhetoric, and that persuasion exists whereever there is meaning.[21] This definition of rhetoric is similar to Ehninger's definition that rhetoric is . . ."all of the ways in which and all of the ends for which, symbols of any sort may be used to influence or affect another's mind".[22]

The significance of Burke's definition of rhetoric is the suggestion that any meaningful behavior comprises rhetoric and therefore should be considered in an analysis of communicative behavior. Furthermore, Burke's "rhetoric" implies specific guidelines for the selection of heuristic cultural variables. First,the synonymity of meaningful behavior and rhetoric stipulates that the process of meaning creation cannot be divorced from intercultural communication research. This signals the necessity of viewing intercultural communication in its natural context. Second, although the study of language is informative and useful, it is not enough. A culture's activities such as music, dance, and art are meaningful

and therefore rhetorical. In this sense, the cognitive anthropologists are blinded to alternative objects of examination by their myopic reliance on linguistic analysis. Similarly, cultural variable analysts ascribe meaning to outcomes, yet fail to establish the justification of their ascriptions from the subject's view of reality.

The aforestated definition of rhetoric provides clues to methodologies that can be profitably employed in intercultural communication research. due to its inclusion within Burke's dramatistic perspective. For Burke, dramatism is " a technique of analysis of language and thought as basically modes of action rather than as a means of conveying information".[23] The emphasis on action portrays human behavior as motivated, or as creating meaning and being assigned meaning through the completion of activity. Human motives, specifically gramatical motives, concern the problem of substance. Burke's explanation of substance bridges the chasm between individual acts and the resultant social order. As Nichols stated: (indent) According to Burke, language of all things "is the most public, most collective, in its substance". Substance in the old philosophies was an act, and a way of life an acting together; and in acting together men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, and attitudes that make them consubstantial. [24]

The dramatistic world view paints man as creating reality through meaningful activity. Although Burke singles out language in this explanation of the substantive meaning of dramatism, it is not congruent with his definition of rhetoric to limit theorists and researchers to linguistic studies.

The construction of reality is a process in which shared symbols "both fit and adjust behavior to a symbolically created world".[25] Burke's world view corresponds to a predominantly sociological orientation. His concept of motivation contrasts with the conception of motivation in the physical sciences; i. e. that motivation may be considered in mechanistic terms of cause and effect.[26] Burke's motivation is explanatory rather than prescriptive.

What are the methodological consequences of the dramatistic perspective? This perspective emphasizes the active process of meaning creation and human motivation. Therefore it is essential for rhetoricians, researchers or communicationists to study communication as a process. Furthermore, communication cannot be dissected and displaced to increase the convenience of observation without disrupting the process of meaning creation. Adjunctly, behavior cannot be separated from the cultural context which supplies meaning.

Ascertaining the motivations of an actor seems to necessitate the use of reflexive interrogation by the actor and the researcher. Reflexive validation allows the determination of motives by reviewing completed action. In short, the dramatistic perspective requires research that examines meaning creation as a culturally bound process validated by reflexive inquiry.

The dramatistic perspective limits the utility of cultural variable analysis and componential analysis as currently practised. Cultural variable analysis violates this perspective by disrupting the process of communication through the isolation of variables which assumes determinism and ignores the importance of the cultural context.

Componential analysis, although not as inappropriate as the former method, restricts researchers from analyzing many types of meaningful behaviors due to its exclusively linguistic analysis. It ignores the role of language as created meaning and eschews reflexive validation by the informants.

Ethnomethodology appears most conguent with the dramatistic perspective. Focusing on the process of meaning creation in the totality of human behavior reinforces the importance of the cultural context. Ethnomethodology is limited by the willingness of the researchers to utilize reflexive validation techniques. The paradigm itself does not impose this restriction; researchers have merely preferred to validate their findings in other ways.

In the dramatistic perspective a key concept is terministic screens. This element suggests a Weltanschauugen assumption of the world view that researchers bring to their endeavors and that societal members operate within. Terminsitic screens are perceptual filters that are a product of the suasive nature of language.[27] These filters direct the selection of stimulus and the interpretation of stimulus. As Burke stated, "If terminology is a reflection of reality, by its very nature, it is a selection of reality and therefore functions as a deflection of reality".[28]

As an interesting parallel to the schools of cultural criticism and cultural dialogue, Burke suggests that there are basically two kinds of terministic screens: those that put things together, and those that take things apart.[29] Extending this parallel indicates that psychology's focus on individuality yields a "difference oriented perspective"; while anthropology's and sociology's focus on social characteristics depends on an "integrative perspective". Therefore, terministic screens can function similarly to the paradigmatic filters discussed by Kuhn.[30]

Different disciplines possess terministic screens which are designed to "focus attention on one or another particular field of observation".[31] The profundity of this statement is readily apparent in a review of the three intercultural communication research methodologies. Cultural variable analysis flows from psychology, componential analysis from anthropology, and ethnomethodology from sociology. Cultural variable analysis investigates individual differences while componential analysis and ethnomethodology study binding social activities. Both ethnomethodology and the dramatistic perspective are inherently sociological; therefore it follows reasonably that the sociological methodology most accurately captures the essence of the dramatistic perspective.

The overriding significance of terministic screens is that they render it impossible for one discipline to "supply an adequate definition of man in general".[32] Yet, the dramatistic screen does possess the philosophic character necessary for the discussion of man in general.[33]

The effects of researchers terministic screens present the possibility ,more accurately, the probability that researchers' selections and interpretations of intercultural communication data is biased. This realization requires researchers to recognize their operating assumptions and to act against biased selection and interpretation activities. Two methods might prove helpful in safeguarding the objectivity and validity of research findings. First, researchers should become familiar with other approaches to intercultural research thereby escaping the restrictions of the screens operating in their disciplines. Secondly, self-reflexiveness of informants and reactions of scholars from other disciplines could provide validation checks on the original interpretation.

The dramatistic perspective constructs an image of communication as sociality. Sociality derives its essence from the synchronization and fusion of unique individuals typified by divisiveness. All people exist in a state of generic division which increases at a societal or class level.[34] Subsequently, when people from different classes or societies communicate, an aura of mystery signifies the interaction, creating barriers which inhibit sharing and understanding. This is the distinguishing characteristic of intercultural communication.

Burke stresses that "the mystery which exists between classes demands a corresponding rhetoric".[35] This rhetoric is typified by the process of identification in which someone or some group attempts to transcend the innate differences between themselves and the people they communicate with.

Identification has been heralded as the key term in Burke's rhetorical theory, replacing the revered position of persuasion in classical theories.[36] Instead of manipulating an audience, identification involves understanding the use of symbols as masks for the differences between peoples and directing attentions toward the use of those symbols to overcome communication barriers.[37] The function of identification lies in its complementarity with division. "If men were not apart from one another there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity."[38] As such, identification leads to understanding which in turn may evolve into cooperation.

The theoretical elements presented in the dramatistic perspective are completed and conjoined through the process of identification. Likewise, the process of intercultural communication research culminates with identification. It suggests the purpose of this research; specifically, over-

coming the barriers between cultures and creating an opportunity of spreading the basis of the social order by fusing social factions.

Applying Burke's rhetorical theories to intercultural communication does more than justify the inclusion of this area in the rubric of communication studies. Hopefully, Burke's theories justify the selection of intercultural variables, implicate appropriate methodologies, instruct researchers about possibly invalidating biases, and explicate methods to use the research findings. Burke's emphasis on meaning mandates observation of all meaningful behavior. The dramatistic perspective relegates cultural variable analysis and componential analysis to the status of inferior research methodologies compared with ethnomethodology. Researchers using sociological methods may improve the validity of their interpretations by recognizing the effects of their terministic screens. Finally, researchers may utilize the recognition of differences to construct bonds that identify commonalities and eliminate differences. Under the tutelage of old man rhetoric, intercultural communication may successfully pass from adolescence to adulthood.

Endnotes

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[9]Ward Goodenough, Description and Comparison in Cognitive Anthropology (Chicago: Aldine Publications, 1970), p. 21.

[10]Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 33.

[11]Harold Garfinkel, Studies in Ethnomethodology (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), p. 9.

[12]George Psathas, "Ethnoscience and Ethnomethodology," in Culture and Cognition, ed. J Spradley (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Co., 1972), p. 209.

[13]Garfinkel, p. 10.

[14]Geertz, p. 35.

[15]Peggy Sanday, "The Ethnographic Paradigm(s)," Administrative Science Quarterly, 24 (1979), p. 533.

[16]Geertz, p. 45.

[17]Psathas, p. 212.

[18]Chu, p. 560.

[19]Geertz, p. 36

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[24]Golden, Berquist, and Coleman, p. 239.

[25]Golden, Berquist, and Coleman, p. 240.

[26]Marie Hochmuth Nichols, "Kenneth Burke and the 'New Rhetoric'," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 38 (1952), p. 95.

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[30]Thomas Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 16.

[31]Burke, 1968, p. 52.

[32]Burke, 1968, p. 45.

[33]Burke, 1968, p. 68.

[34]Nichols, p. 93.

[35]Virginia Fry, "Heads I Win - Tails You Lose: A Preliminary Analysis of Kenneth Burke's Concept of Mystery," Paper presented at the Speech Communication Association Convention, New York, 1980.

[36]Roy Ambrester, "Identification Within: Kenneth Burke's View of the Unconscious," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 7 (1974), p. 205.

[37]Fry, p. 12.

[38]Kenneth Burke, The Rhetoric of Motives (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1969), p. 115.

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